

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study to determine whether all or part of the Gaviota Coast study area is suitable and feasible for designation as a unit of the National Park System. Congress authorized this study in 1999 in response to local requests. The study area covers a 76-mile stretch of coastal watersheds in Santa Barbara County, from Coal Oil Point to Point Sal, including all of Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Through the feasibility study process, the NPS has made the following determinations about the Gaviota Coast study area:

- The natural and cultural resources of the area are **nationally significant**, meeting all four of the NPS criteria for national significance.
- The area is **suitable for inclusion** in the National Park System, as it represents natural and cultural resource types that are not already adequately represented in the System or protected by another land managing entity.
- The area is **not a feasible addition** to the National Park System because sufficient land is not currently available to the NPS; strong opposition from study area landowners makes it unlikely that effective NPS management could occur; and the NPS is not able to undertake new management responsibilities of this

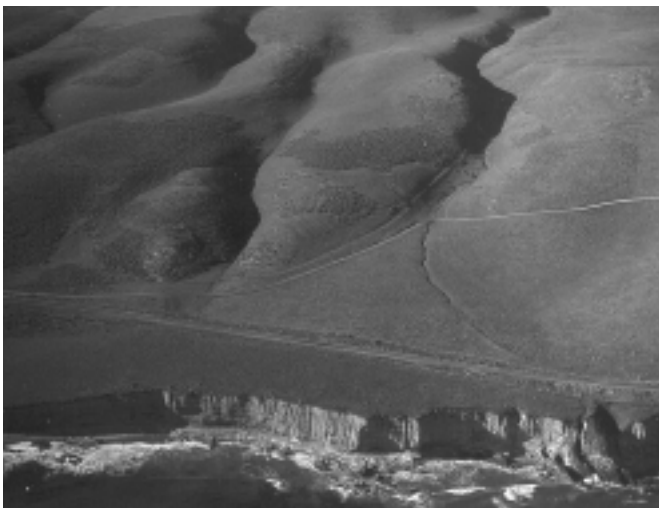
cost and magnitude, given current national financial priorities.

- While NPS management, if feasible, could contribute to the conservation of the area's resources, **management by organizations other than NPS is recommended.**

Two alternatives that do not include NPS management are considered feasible and are evaluated in an Environmental Assessment:

- **Alternative 1:** Continuation of Current Programs and Policies. This is the “no action” alternative for this study, and assumes that current programs, policies, conditions and trends would continue.
- **Alternative 2:** Enhanced Local and State Management. This alternative provides a menu of programs and tools that could be pursued by the local community.

The NPS prepared an Environmental Assessment to identify and analyze the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each of the alternatives. Alternative 2 is considered the “environmentally preferred” alternative because it increases the local capacity for permanent land conservation, effective management of significant natural and cultural resources, and public understanding of the significance of the area.



Gaviota Coast, NPS photo



Jalama Beach, NPS photo

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front cover: monarch butterfly, Jalama Beach, and Bixby Ranch: NPS; Gaviota tarplant: Kevin Merk; Point Conception: Rich Reid / Colors of Nature
back cover: Jalama Beach and flowers: NPS; coastal bluffs: Mike Lunsford



Part 1: Feasibility Study

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this Feasibility Study (also known as Special Resource Study) of the Gaviota Coast to provide information to Congress on the significance of Gaviota Coast resources, and on the suitability and feasibility of designating the area as a unit of the National Park System.

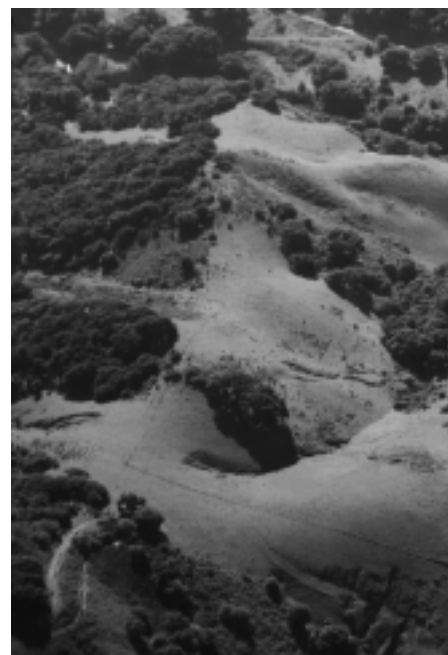
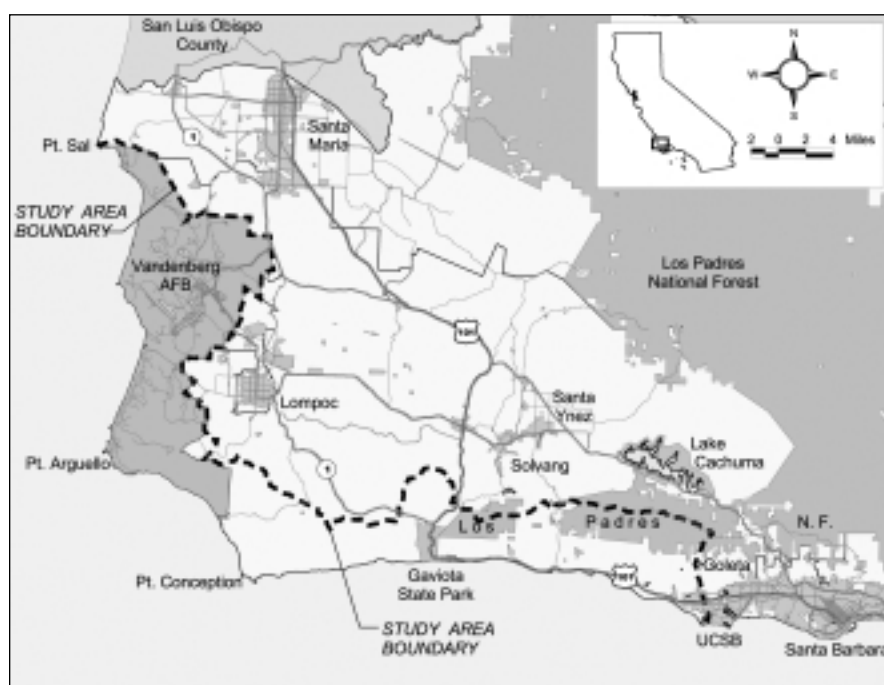
BACKGROUND

In November 1999, Congress authorized the NPS to evaluate the feasibility of including all or part of the Gaviota Coast in the National Park System (P.L. 106-113, 113 Stat. 1535, 1537 - Nov. 29, 1999). The study was authorized in response to local requests, and endorsement of the study proposal from local and state government agencies and elected officials and Congressional representatives. The study area covers a 76-mile stretch of coast in Santa Barbara County, between Coal Oil Point at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), and Point Sal near the northern boundary of Vandenberg Air Force Base (Vandenberg AFB). The study area boundary includes the coastal watersheds and all of Vandenberg AFB, defining an area of approximately 215,000 acres (see map below). Approximately 41% of the study area is private land, 46% is federal land in Vandenberg Air Force Base, and the remaining 13% is a mix of federal, state and county ownership.

STUDY PROCESS

Legislative and Policy Direction. Several laws and policies outline criteria for units of the national park system. The National Park System New Area Studies Act (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5) establishes the basic process for NPS studies of potential new national park areas. NPS management policies provide further guidance. According to NPS management policies, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS only if meets all of the following four criteria for inclusion:

- (1) it possesses nationally significant natural or cultural resources;
- (2) it is a suitable addition to the system;
- (3) it is a feasible addition to the system; and
- (4) it requires direct NPS management, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.



Bixby Ranch, NPS photo

Public Involvement. The NPS Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study process was initiated in January, 2000, with a series of meetings with public agencies. Public scoping meetings were held in March, 2000, in various locations near the study area. The scoping comment period originally extended until May 31, 2000 but was later reopened from September 12 to November 30, 2000. On July 26 and 27, 2000, the NPS study team hosted two all-day workshops for agricultural interests and others, aimed at defining desired future conditions along the Gaviota Coast.

The NPS published six newsletters throughout the study process. Numerous articles and opinion pieces about the feasibility study have also appeared in area newspapers. In January 2002, the NPS distributed a "Protection Strategies Worksheet," soliciting public opinions on a

variety of resource conservation strategies. The comment period remained open through September 1, 2002. On August 19, 2002, NPS funded another public forum, organized by the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce and the Business First National Bank, to present a diversity of private, local and other land use tools and strategies that could be adapted for use in the Gaviota Coast area.

Publication, Review and Transmittal. Publication of the Draft Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study Report and Environmental Assessment will be followed by a public comment period. The NPS study team will then revise the report if needed, and transmit it to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary will transmit the report to Congress, along with the Secretary's recommendation for the area.

SIGNIFICANCE

National Park Service professionals, in consultation with subject matter experts, scholars, and scientists, determine whether a study area is nationally significant. Natural and cultural resource experts and scholars, locally and within the National Park Service, contributed research and technical review for the study area's statement of significance. An area is significant if it:

- (1) is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource;
- (2) possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage;
- (3) offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment, or for scientific study; and,
- (4) retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

The National Park Service found that the study area contains both natural and cultural resources that meet the four criteria for national significance. The following list summarizes the nationally significant natural and cultural resources within the study area.

Natural Resources

- ✓ The study area is part of one of the rarest global biomes, the Evergreen Sclerophyllous Forest (Mediterranean plant communities), characterized by a mild Mediterranean climate caused by the interaction of global weather and cold-water upwelling on the west coast of a continent. It is one of only five such locations in the world that contain this unique climate and associated vegetation.
- ✓ The study area is the only location in the nation that features an ecological transition zone between northern and southern Mediterranean plant communities. " *The Gaviota Coast is a transition zone among many factors of contrast, perhaps the most significant of which is the transition between central (or northern) California and Southern California. Many northern plant species reach their southern geographic limits north of the Santa Ynez Mountains and many southern species reach their geographic limits south of the Santa Ynez Mountains*" (Wayne Ferren and Kathy Rindlaub, Museum of Systematics and Ecology, Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology, University of California, Santa Barbara).
- ✓ The study area borders the biologically diverse marine transition zone attributed to the confluence of two major oceanic currents and the shape of the continental shelf at Point Conception. Marine and



terrestrial ecosystems of the study area work together in a *"large-scale system of relationships where biophysical processes of land, water and wind work in concert to form unique species and habitats of the Southern California Bight* (Michael McGinnis, University of California Santa Barbara's Ocean and Coastal Policy Center, Marine Sciences Institute)."

- ✓ The Gaviota Coast is Southern California's largest continuous stretch of rural coastal land and its healthiest remaining coastal ecosystem. Although the coastal area between Coal Oil Point and Point Sal comprises only 15% of southern California's coast, it includes approximately 50% of its remaining rural coastline providing a refuge for plant and animal species that have been severely reduced from their former range.
- ✓ Within the study area, rare and endangered habitat includes bishop pine forest, tanbark oak forest, valley oak woodlands, coastal sage-chaparral scrub, central maritime chaparral, native grassland, wetlands, riparian woodlands, coastal dunes and strand, and marine ecosystems such as kelp beds, sea grasses, and rocky marine intertidal zones.
- ✓ An estimated 1,400 plant and animal species are found in the study area. Review of species accounts from various local, state, and federal agencies indicate that the study area contains 24 federally- or state-listed threatened or endangered plant and animal species and another 60 species of rare and special concern (including proposed endangered, threatened, candidate, and sensitive).
- ✓ Ophiolitic rock formations in the Point Sal area are nationally significant for their potential of contributions to scientific research on the formation of the earth's crust. Ophiolites are pieces of oceanic plate that have been thrust onto the edge of continental plates. The ophiolitic sequence at Point Sal comes nearest to being complete, and it is also relatively well-exposed in sea cliffs and wave cut patterns. This series is one of the best-exposed and best-studied ophiolites in North America.

Cultural Resources

- ✓ The entire study area coast is traversed by the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail. The trail commemorates the route taken by Juan Bautista de Anza in 1775-76 when he led a group of colonists from Mexico to found a presidio and mission for New Spain at San Francisco. *"The Gaviota Coast represents one of the most significant, intact, historic landscapes along the Anza Trail. Outside of the California deserts, this is the one place that trail visitors can go to get a feel for what the Anza expedition would have seen and experienced two centuries ago"* (David Smith, Interpretive Specialist, Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail).
- ✓ The Gaviota Coast contains some of the oldest and best-preserved Native American archeological sites in California, spanning over 10,000 years. *"The archeological resources of the Gaviota Coast are exceptionally valuable due to their relatively preserved state, their depiction of a culture that dates back [10,000] years, and their inclusion of features that are unique to the State of California and the nation"* (John Johnson, Curator of Anthropology, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History).
- ✓ Nationally significant sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places include the *SS Yankee Blade* Shipwreck, and the Point Conception Light Station Historic District.
- ✓ Vandenberg AFB contains one of the most comprehensive assemblages of Cold War missile and space launch facilities in the country, offering opportunities for preservation and interpretation of an important era in American foreign policy and global political influence in the nuclear age. During the Cold War period, Vandenberg AFB was the only site in the United States from which intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) were test-launched under operational conditions (U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, 1998a). Designated in 1986, Space Launch Complex 10 is a National Historic Landmark representing the best surviving example of a launch complex built in the 1950's at the beginning of the American effort to explore space. An additional sixty-nine cold war and space launch sites surveyed on Vandenberg AFB have been evaluated as nationally significant by the California State Office of Historic Preservation.



- ✓ The study area is home to Rancho del Cielo, known as the “Western White House” during President Ronald Reagan’s terms in office. Rancho del Cielo was President Reagan’s private ranch, and served as the location for historic events and visits from world leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher. Even though the Rancho del Cielo is significant for events that have happened within the last fifty years, the association with President Reagan, and the political events that took place at this location are of transcendent importance to United States history.
- ✓ Additional resources that may be found to be nationally significant include the historic ranching landscape and the collection of maritime resources found along the coast. Further research is needed to determine the significance of these resources.



El Capitan State Beach, NPS photo

SUITABILITY

An area is considered suitable for addition to the national park system if it:

- (1) represents a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the national park system; or
- (2) is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land managing entity, including other federal agencies; Tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.

Adequacy of representation is determined on a case-by-case basis by comparing the potential new park addition to other comparably managed areas representing the same resource type, while considering differences or similarities in the character, quality, quantity, or combination of resource values.

The study area resources represent a wide variety of natural history and cultural resource themes identified by the National Park Service. Natural history themes

represented by resources in the study area include: *Land Ecosystems*, *Landforms of the Present*, and *Aquatic Ecosystems*. Cultural resource themes include: *Peopling Places*, *Shaping the Political Landscape*, *Expanding Science and Technology*, *the Changing Role of the United States in the World Community*, and *Developing the American Economy*.

Based upon evaluation of natural history themes and cultural themes, the Gaviota Coast study area is suitable for inclusion in the National Park System. The natural resource types that are not yet adequately represented in the National Park System include the south-facing seashore (*Landforms of the Present*) and the species diversity created by the terrestrial and marine transition zones between northern and southern California (*Land Ecosystems*). Cultural resource types that are not yet adequately represented in the National Park System include the rich archeological resources representing 10,000 years of human occupation (*Peopling Places*) and the historical resources related to the Cold War era (*Expanding Science and Technology*, *the Changing Role of the United States in the World Community*).



FEASIBILITY

To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, an area must:

- (1) be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries); and
- (2) be capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost.

In evaluating feasibility, the National Park Service considers a variety of factors including boundary size and configuration, land use, ownership patterns, planning and zoning, access and public enjoyment potential, existing resource degradation and threats to the resources, public interest and support, social and economic impact, and costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration and operation.

Based upon evaluation of land availability, acquisition and management costs, and public support, the NPS finds that the Gaviota Coast study area is not a feasible addition to the National Park system. The determination was made based on the following factors:

- Land sufficient and appropriate for the establishment of a national park unit does not appear to be available to the NPS;
- It is unlikely, due to strong opposition expressed by study area landowners, that efficient NPS management could occur;
- Within the context of the commitments of the U.S. President, Secretary of the Interior and Director of the NPS to address other national financial priorities, the NPS is not able to undertake new land acquisition and management responsibilities of this potential cost and magnitude.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

NPS *Management Policies* specify that unless direct NPS management of a studied area is identified as the clearly superior alternative, the NPS will recommend that one or more other entities assume a lead management role and that the area not receive National Park System status. The NPS developed and considered a number of options involving NPS management, before determining that such options were infeasible. The following four management options were considered:

National Reserve: NPS and a Congressionally chartered, locally based non-profit Gaviota Trust would have had authority to acquire easements from willing sellers and collaborate on resource protection, agricultural conservation, public access and education throughout much of the study area below Vandenberg AFB. NPS could have acquired land in fee from willing sellers only in a narrow coastal strip.

National Seashore: NPS would have had authority to acquire land (from willing sellers only) and manage selected significant coastal watersheds, from Sudden Ranch on Vandenberg AFB to Eagle Canyon, as well as a

narrow coastal strip. The NPS would have used a mix of fee acquisition, easements, incentives and partnership programs to retain the cultural landscape and maintain the viability of farming and ranching.

National Seashore (coastal option): NPS would have had authority to acquire (from willing sellers only) and manage portions of the coastal edge below Vandenberg AFB, and excluding Hollister Ranch.

National Preserve: Congress would have established a National Preserve incorporating all of the study area, with NPS management only of land acquired by NPS (from willing sellers only). NPS would have offered interpretive programs throughout the area, including on Vandenberg AFB.

If NPS management were considered financially and politically feasible, the NPS could contribute significantly to the conservation of the Gaviota Coast study area resources, in conjunction with the contributions of other agencies and organizations, and continued private stewardship. However, because of factors outlined in the feasibility discussion, the NPS recommends management by other organizations.



ALTERNATIVES

When NPS management is determined infeasible, NPS *Management Policies* specify that alternatives for NPS management will not be developed. Therefore, alternatives that include NPS management are not analyzed in this report. Two alternatives that do not include NPS management were prepared for analysis. These alternatives include:

- **Alternative 1: Continuation of Current Programs and Policies (No Action); and**
- **Alternative 2: Enhanced Local and State Management**

Goals. The following goals were developed for all alternatives and represent the values that appeared to be shared by the majority of the respondents in the various public input opportunities throughout the study process.

- Protect significant natural and cultural resources.
- Protect scenic resources.
- Maintain the viability of farms and ranches.
- Continue local control and private land stewardship.
- Increase the capability and funding for protection of significant resources, agricultural lands, and opportunities for public enjoyment.
- Reduce conflict between public access and private lands.
- Increase public understanding and appreciation of the Gaviota Coast.



historic lifeboat rescue station, Vandenberg AFB, NPS photo

Alternative 1: Continuation of Current Programs and Policies (No Action)

Alternative 1 is the “no action” alternative for this study. Under Alternative 1, the NPS would take no action in the study area beyond those actions already authorized (e.g. recreation grant programs, historic preservation programs, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail). Current programs and policies of existing federal, state and county agencies and non-profit conservation organizations would remain in place and current conditions and trends would continue. Land use changes would occur, consistent with county and state decisions under zoning, the Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan (coastal plan), and other existing regulations.

Private land stewardship. Under this alternative, it is assumed that private land stewardship would continue at approximately the same level of activity. Many landowners would continue to protect the open space values of the study area through personal initiative – farming and cattle ranching, fencing streams or sensitive cultural areas, keeping the land in the family rather than selling for development. Some landowners would continue to work voluntarily with local and national land trusts to convey agricultural and conservation easements (interests in land) to permanently protect their land from development.

Non-profit conservation activities. Non-profit conservation activities would continue at approximately the same levels of activity. Local groups would continue their advocacy for strong planning and zoning measures and for public land and easement acquisition. Land trusts, such as the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County and the Trust for Public Land, would continue to be active in the acquisition and management of land and easements within the Gaviota Coast study area.

Agricultural land conservation. Agricultural land conservation activities would continue at approximately their current levels of activity. Tax incentives programs such as Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act of 1965) and Super Williamson Act (Farmland Security Act of 1998) would protect agricultural resources, preserve open space land, and promote efficient urban growth patterns. Incentives for environmental and soil conservation would include technical assistance programs for farmland protection, protecting wetlands and riparian corridors, reducing erosion, providing or restoring wildlife habitat, and protecting watersheds.



Regulatory and incentive programs (local, state and federal). Local, state and federal regulatory and incentive programs would continue at approximately their current levels. Santa Barbara County would continue to control land uses within its jurisdiction through its comprehensive plan, coastal plan, and zoning ordinances. Santa Barbara County would continue to implement its Local Coastal Program. The City of Goleta would continue the transition process from county to city management and regulation, and would develop a comprehensive plan, coastal plan, zoning ordinances, and permitting processes. State and federal agencies would continue current management of the resources and activities they are responsible for managing.

Public land management and access. Public agencies would continue their land management, visitor services, public education and interpretation programs at approximately current levels of activity and funding, according to their current plans. Los Padres National Forest's recreation programs and management of the scenic viewshed along the south slope of the Santa Ynez

Mountains would continue. The Bureau of Land Management would continue to manage its land at Point Sal as an "Area of Critical Concern" and would continue its planning effort for the California Coastal National Monument. The Channel Coast District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation would continue to manage existing parks and to develop new areas according to current plans. Santa Barbara County would continue to manage Jalama Beach and Ocean Beach County Parks and its land at Point Sal. The County would continue planning and development of a continuous coastal hiking / biking / equestrian trail. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail would continue to partner with other groups to mark the historic trail route and provide and enhance interpretive programs.

Vandenberg Air Force Base. Vandenberg AFB would continue its commitment to natural and cultural resource management and would provide limited visitor access, education and interpretation of Vandenberg AFB's natural and cultural resources.



Bixby Ranch, NPS photo

